





# SAFETY:

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The DOL presentation showed that the governor’s proposed budget would spend \$1.8 million less on the department next year if the budget remained unchanged. Hoffman asked DOL Administrative Services Director Anna Kim how the department can do its job better while spending less money.

Kim pointed to a \$1.1 million fiscal note that would go to the department if Senate Bill 32 (which extends sentences for offenders) is passed by the Legislature. She said that money can help offset the state cuts.

“We’ll still continue to do the things that we do in the department,” Kim said. “We’ll still continue to prioritize things in the department as we have in the past and we’ll manage within the resources we have. We feel that positive fiscal note will have an impact on the activities that will be tough on crime.”

Hoffman wasn’t satisfied with the response.

“The fiscal note doesn’t cover the total amount,” Hoffman said. “The explanation seems



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Sen. Lyman Hoffman, D-Bethel, poses questions to Department of Corrections and Office of Management and Budget officials during a Senate Finance Committee meeting on Friday.

lacking to me for the general public. There is a reduction that is to me a substantial amount and the people of Alaska deserve an answer for what is not going to be performed as a result of this reduction.”

Hoffman and his fel-

low committee members repeatedly expressed frustration with the budget proposal in presentations Thursday and Friday. Sen. Peter Micciche, R-Soldotna, said in Friday’s meeting he was surprised that the state is pondering closing down

a wing of Wildwood Correctional Center in his district. Sen. Bill Wielchowski, D-Anchorage, said in Thursday’s meeting that he was surprised at a \$3 million cut to the state’s Village Public Safety Officer program. Presenters, including

deputy commissioners and other department officials alongside Office of Management and Budget Director Donna Arduin, kept telling the senators that they felt they could continue to operate their departments well with less

state funding. They also emphasized that while funding from the state’s General Fund might be decreasing, funding from federal sources and from legislation might be increasing. For example, a fiscal note (an estimate of state costs) from Dunleavy’s Senate Bill 32 (which increases sentences for offenders) estimates that the state will have to spend \$1.1 million on the DOC if the bill goes through. OMB Deputy Director Laura Cramer said in an interview after Friday’s meeting that she expected the senators to provide tough feedback. She said this is only a warm-up for when they talk about cuts to education, where the governor’s budget proposes the state make much more significant cuts than the cuts to public safety departments. “I think that they should be critical,” Cramer said. “(These are) some significant changes to the budget, maybe it’s just a sampling of what we’ll see for the Department of Education and the university and those programs that are seeing larger cuts.”

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# HOUSE:

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are set, the House can start tackling legislation. For example, the House Finance Committee could start working on the budget.

Kopp had been tagged as majority leader, but he switched positions with Thompson Friday morning. He called it a “mutual decision.”

“I think it was a matter of preference, skill set for each position,” Kopp said. Kopp said he had more experience in dealing with “process intensive” side of things including Mason’s Manual of Legislative Procedure, the book of procedural rules the Alaska Legislature uses to conduct its meetings.

“We decided it would

be an ideal position for each one of us,” Kopp added.

Thompson was unavailable for comment to comment Friday afternoon on his new role.

## House Majority Coalition

The bipartisan House Majority Coalition consisted of 25 members as of Friday. Rep. Bart LeBon was the 25th member to join the majority.

LeBon, a freshman Republican from Fairbanks, was the 25th member to join the Majority Coalition.

“The appointment of Representatives Wilson and Thompson to key leadership positions gave me justification for joining the majority caucus,” LeBon said. Wilson and Thompson are veteran Republicans from the Interior. “Hopefully I’ll be sitting on the Finance Committee with Repre-

sentative Wilson.”

LeBon, a retired banker, believes his experience would serve well on that committee.

He also spoke about why he joined the other five Interior delegates in the majority caucus.

“We gave it the all-American try, both sides of the aisle did,” LeBon said. “It became clear to me there was no settlement date in sight without some kind of bold action from one caucus or the other to bridge the divide.”

“It became apparent that we needed to find some common ground the (Interior delegates) feel that we have found that common ground,” LeBon said.

The party breakdown of the House Majority Coalition is: 16 Democrats in Reps. Neal Foster, Nome; Matt Claman, Anchorage; Harriet Drummond, Anchorage;

Zack Fields, Anchorage; Sara Hannan, Juneau; Grier Hopkins, Fairbanks; Andy Josephson, Anchorage; Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins, Sitka; John Lincoln, Kotzebue; Ivy Sponholz, Anchorage; Andi Story, Juneau; Geran Tarr, Anchorage; Chris Tuck, Anchorage; Adam Wool, Fairbanks and Tiffany Zulkosky of Bethel. Eight Republicans in Reps. Tammie Wilson, North Pole; Gary Knopp, Kenai; Steve Thompson, Fairbanks; Louise Stutes, Kodiak; Gabrielle LeDoux, Anchorage; Bart LeBon, Fairbanks, Jennifer Johnston; Anchorage and Chuck Kopp of Anchorage. Two non-affiliated members in Reps. Dan Ortiz, Ketchikan and Bryce Edgmon Dillingham.

## House Minority

The Republican Minority will be led by Rep. Lance Pruitt, R-Anchor-

age. “As much as it’s been kind of frustrating over the last month, we look forward to getting to work,” Pruitt said, during a Friday morning press conference.

Pruitt said Republicans who joined the majority may see things differently, but that does not mean they “won’t be able to work for what’s right for Alaska.”

“The point is we can still work together,” Pruitt added.

Pruitt was also asked why he did not join the House majority.

“One of the concerns that I had,” Pruitt said, “is I’m very concerned about being a part of caucus with people who that have very different ideas on the future of Alaska, and yet having to be a part of a binding caucus that demanded that I agree to the issues that are on the opposite side

of where I find myself”

Rep. DeLena Johnson of Palmer will be the minority whip.

Rep. Cathy Tilton of Wasilla will be the Republican finance leader. This is a position within the House minority, not the House Finance Committee.

The other 12 members of the Republican House Minority consists of Reps. Ben Carpenter, Nikiski; David Eastman, Wasilla; Sharon Jackson, Eagle River; Kelly Merrick, Eagle River; Mark Neuman, Big Lake; Sara Rasmussen, Anchorage; George Rauscher, Sutton; Josh Revak, Anchorage; Laddie Shaw, Anchorage; Colleen Sullivan-Leonard, Wasilla; Dave Talerico, Healy; and Sara Vance of Homer.

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# INMATES:

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These cuts would be cut in part by a combined \$11 million from federal funding and from “other” sources. Robb said a large amount of this “other” category comes from Permanent Fund Dividends that some inmates apply for but don’t receive because they’re ineligible. She said this money usually goes to health care in prisons.

Estimated state costs (fiscal notes) from Dunleavy’s proposed crime bills will also help offset cuts, presenters said to the Senate Finance Committee on Thursday and Friday.

The state used to send inmates out of state and

stopped a few years ago, as Sen. Bill Wielechowski, D-Anchorage, pointed out during Friday’s meeting. In an interview after the meeting, DOC Administrative Services Director Sylvan Robb said the department started phasing out of sending prisoners out of state in 2012 or 2013.

The main reason the state stopped sending inmates out of state, Robb said, was because Goose Creek Correctional Center north of Anchorage was built, so the state had room to keep everyone in state.

Now, as the Dunleavy administration aims to cut \$1.6 billion from the state’s spending in order to balance the budget without any new revenues, OMB and DOC are considering bringing back the program of sending inmates out of state.

Kara Nelson, the former

director of Haven House in Juneau (a faith-based home for women entering society after leaving prison) and a longtime advocate for reentry efforts in Alaska, told the Empire

Sylvan Robb said the department started phasing out of sending prisoners out of state in a phone interview Friday that the conditions of many of the prisons people were sent to out of state were “horrendous.”

Nelson, who spent time in prison herself, said the father of her children was sent to prisons in Colorado and Arizona and that it was extremely difficult for her and her children to stay in touch with him.

Nelson was particularly critical of private prisons.

“It’s big business, and it’s unfortunate that people are making money off the backs of socially, economically challenged, marginalized communities,” Nelson said. “Especially in Alaska, when we have so many rural areas,

we’re already at a disadvantage when they have to go to prison in our larger communities, let alone taking them out of state.”

In the long run, she said, sending people out of state will harm them and harm the state. In her reentry work, Nelson has heard many stories about how poor the health care is in private prisons and how little oversight and transparency there is in the prisons.

When people come back to Alaska after stays at bad prisons outside the state, she said, many of them haven’t received treatment they need for mental health or substance abuse disorder issues. She said it’s not surprising that this administration is proposing this.

“It’s devastating,” Nelson said. “Our state right now, especially because

of the exploitation that you’re seeing in our political government of people’s fears at the moment, which is my view of it, it’s really a shame because the effects of this are not going to be worth any dollars that they think that they’re saving.”

## A connection to the industry?

The issue of private prisons has woven through this legislative session already, as lawmakers have called attention to Arduin’s previous ties to the industry. Arduin has held positions with organizations connected with private prison company GEO Group, according to a 2005 report from the LA Times.

In a tense exchange at Friday’s presentation, Wielechowski specifically asked Arduin about her connections to the private

prison industry, and said Arduin had been on the board of GEO Group.

“I was not on the board of GEO,” Arduin said. “I have no connections with private prisons and I have not had any conversations with them.”

In a statement recently emailed to the Empire, OMB Deputy Commissioner Laura Cramer provided some clarification about Arduin’s connections to GEO Group.

“She was an independent trustee for a publicly traded company, Centrcore Properties Trust (a REIT) during 2005-2006,” Cramer’s statement read. “GEO was one of Centrcore’s leasing customers. She never had a financial interest with GEO or GEO Care.”

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# MEDIA:

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the “Midnight Oil” podcast. Alaska Public Media also receives federal funding, about \$1 million or 18 percent of its budget. The vast majority, 75 percent, or \$4.2 million of Alaska Public Media’s funding comes

from community donations.

It’s difficult to say how these cuts might affect the different public media organizations in Alaska.

“A station like the KTOO complex will probably survive,” Rep. Sara Hannan, D-Juneau said. “The more rural parts of public radio may not...I of course oppose these cuts. I will fight for that small subsidy. Public broadcasting in Alaska

has been a lifeline to rural Alaska.”

Hannan said public radio is especially important to rural communities because these markets are not ideal for private radio to be successful. Hannan noted that some have argued that rural Alaskans can just use the internet to stream the radio, but high costs and lack of infrastructure make that impossible in some places.

“Certainly in certain parts of Alaska the idea of just beaming it out there won’t work,” Hannan said of internet radio.

Hannan called the proposed cut “short sighted.”

“They’ve found there’s a public safety element. In most of Alaska there is no network service that will provide weather forecasts and tsunami warnings that public broadcasting puts into every corner of Alaska.

Much like the University of Alaska system that is facing a \$155 million cut, leaders at the different networks will have to make difficult decisions on how to implement the cuts at their respective radio stations. That could result in cuts to programming, job positions or other areas.

Of course, the budget is not final and the House and Senate will work on the budget.

Other Southeast Alaska radio station grant allocations for the current fiscal year include: KCAW in Sitka received \$78,123; KSKF, Petersburg received \$76,499; KHNS, Haines received \$74,876; KRBD, Ketchikan received \$78,123; KSTK, Wrangell received \$75,417.

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